

Rising Star: Cleary Gottlieb's Aaron Meyers

Law360, New York (July 16, 2017, 3:02 PM EDT) -- Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP's Aaron Meyers has cultivated an expertise in handling particularly tricky carve-out transactions and divestitures like Asahi Kasei's acquisition and simultaneous sale of half of Polypore, landing the M&A practitioner — who almost pursued an engineering career instead of law — a spot among attorneys under 40 being honored by Law360 as Rising Stars.

WHAT SPARKED HIS LOVE FOR M&A:

Meyers' passion for advising clients on mergers and acquisitions was actually sparked by an experience he had while working toward a master's degree in electrical engineering. At the time, he was considering if he truly wanted to work as an engineer when his thesis supervisor was called as an expert witness in a patent infringement litigation.

"He was consulting with us, his grad students, about the case, and it turned out the lawyer he was working with was a former doctoral student of his," Meyers said. "Speaking with him got me thinking that the kinds of skills that you learn as an engineering student — problem solving skills, both through analytic reasoning and creativity, or thinking outside of the box — those sorts of skills apply in a lot contexts and I didn't have to feel boxed into this particular expertise."

That experience, combined with a desire to move to New York, landed Meyers at New York University School of Law. He tried out a few legal practices as a summer associate, and found that the client-centric and non-adversarial nature of M&A spoke to him the most.

"There's something about that that gives me a sense of fulfillment in that work that I didn't think I'd find in other practices I'd considered as an associate," Meyers said.

RISING
 ★★★★★
STAR



Aaron Meyers
Cleary Gottlieb

Age: 36

Home base: New York

Position: Partner

Law school: New York University of Law

First job after law school: Associate at Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP

HIS MOST CHALLENGING DEAL:

Meyers' most challenging transaction came together in 2015, when he steered Japanese chemical maker Asahi Kasei Corp. on a complex acquisition of Polypore International Inc. that also saw its target — with Meyers' guidance — sell roughly half of its operations to 3M Co.

The transaction was unique because Asahi Kasei did not yet own Polypore and the soon-to-be parent did not have the access and knowledge a company normally would when structuring an agreement for the carve-out.

“Simultaneously with the acquisition, we negotiated a divestiture of one of Polypore’s two main lines of business to 3M,” he said. “Having to negotiate those provisions without having the benefit of direct contact with the folks who were running the business that was about to be sold made that particularly challenging.”

OTHER NOTEWORTHY TRANSACTIONS:

Meyers has steered a number of high-profile deals throughout his career, such as acting as counsel to Family Dollar Stores Inc. in its acquisition by Dollar Tree Inc. The tie-up of the discount retailers, valued at \$8.5 billion when it was inked in April 2015, saw challenge after challenge, including a third-party bidder, pressure from an activist investor and scrutiny from the Federal Trade Commission.

His other noteworthy work features advising Western Digital Corp. on its \$16 billion acquisition of SanDisk, private equity firm TPG in its acquisition and subsequent \$2 billion sale of pharmacy benefit management company Envision Pharmaceutical Holdings, Clariant in its merger of equals with Huntsman Corp. to form a \$20 billion speciality chemical company, and Google and its parent Alphabet in a handful of deals over the years, like Google’s \$12.5 billion acquisition of Motorola Mobility and Alphabet’s \$600 million sale of a minority stake in Verily Life Sciences to Temasek.

ADVICE TO ASPIRING M&A ATTORNEYS:

“It’s a challenging career and the most important thing is to pay close attention to your clients’ desires and understand their needs and the support you can offer,” Meyers said. “Basically, anticipate ahead of time exactly what you could be doing to make their lives easier.”

--As told to Chelsea Naso.

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2017 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,200 submissions. This interview has been edited and condensed.